

## Chapter 18

Vs. 1-15, The appearance of the Lord is ambiguous in this passage. Was the Lord one of the 3 persons? All 3 persons (the Trinity)? Abraham does not seem to know that he is visited by “the Lord” until the visitor makes the promise of Sarah’s pregnancy, but even still offers himself as his visitor’s humble servant and offers extravagant hospitality (which he humbly described as “a little water and a little bread.” Abraham asks Sarah to make the finest semolina cakes, and provides the fatted calf, and yogurt (all foods that would have been reserved for celebrations). Abraham gives the best of what he has. And the Lord reiterates the promise that Sarah will give birth to her own son. Sarah laughs at the thought of this impossible promise, and then she and the Lord banter back and forth about whether or not she laughed. This passage is intended to be a humorous one -further laying the foundation for Isaac’s name, which is a play on the word “laughter.” God has a sense of humor!

Vs. 16-33, However, reminding Sarah and Abraham of the promise is not the only reason for the Lord’s visit. The Lord decides to tell Abraham about the fate of Sodom as a cautionary tale to reinforce the importance of passing down righteousness and love of justice to his many descendants who are called to be a blessing to the world. The residents of Sodom are the opposite of righteous and just, and therefore they face the Lord’s wrath. Abraham -knowing that his nephew lives in Sodom- negotiates with God for anyone (his nephew included) who may be found to be righteous in Sodom that the whole town may be saved. Abraham appeals to God’s identity as “Just Judge of the Earth” to make a just decision about what to do, taking both the wicked and the righteous into consideration. Abraham’s haggling actually does change the mind of God to show grace and mercy to Sodom if only 10 righteous persons are found within it.

## Chapter 19

We’re now told that two of the three people who visited Abraham are two angels, who go to Sodom to test them according to the Lord’s righteous judgement. It was particularly dangerous for travelers in the ancient world to travel at night time. Lot recognized the travelers immediately as vulnerable and offered them the appropriate, righteous hospitality. He knew that they’d be taking their lives into their hands by sleeping outside in the square -particularly because of the wickedness of his neighbors in Sodom. To protect these vulnerable travelers, he offers them food and

lodging, and offers himself up as their servant. The hospitality that Lot showed the travelers is in line with that which Abraham showed them - though Lot does not seem to realize these are divine messengers when he offers such kindness, and he offers them simple unleavened bread rather than an extravagant feast. This kindness and hospitality (appropriate action toward the stranger) contrasts sharply with the behavior of the rest of the citizens of Sodom. All the men -young and old- came to find the vulnerable strangers and demand that they be brought out into the square so that the mob could rape them. This story is not about homosexuality, the sin of Sodom is actually extreme inhospitality, and the threat of abuse against the vulnerable. Tragically, Lot goes to extreme lengths to protect the vulnerable strangers under his roof -offering his own daughters up to the evil mob to do with as they please. Lot is essentially saying that it would be a greater dishonor to allow vulnerable travelers under his care to face harm than to allow his daughters to lose their virginity to the crowd (which would also be a grave dishonor). Hospitality and care of the most vulnerable is an essential characteristic of righteousness. As Lot and his family seem to be the only righteous citizens in all of Sodom, Sodom's death sentence is determined. Even the men to whom his daughters were betrothed are not righteous as they do not respect Lot and think he's joking when he tells them that the city will be destroyed. Therefore, the next morning the angels send Lot, his wife, and his daughters out of the city while they obliterate what was once the choicest and fertile of lands. The story about Lot's wife turning to salt is probably included to explain some strange salt formation found in the land. The area described is rich in sulfur and other mineral deposits.

Lot and his two daughters settled in a cave outside of Zoar, but given the bizarre and extreme nature of this story it seems that the three of them may believe they are the last people alive on earth. Therefore, Lot's daughters decide to take matters into their own hands to ensure that humanity will survive. This strange story of Lot's daughter's getting their father drunk and getting pregnant by him describes the origin of the neighboring civilizations (Moabites and Ammonites who would be enemies of Israel from time to time). Ironically Lot avoided being raped by the men of Sodom, only to later be raped by his daughters who grew up in Sodom, furthermore Lot was raped by the same daughters he offered up to the mob.

## Chapter 20

The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham is further threatened by Abraham's foolish behavior. In chapter 12 when he told the king of Egypt that Sarah was his sister it was not clear yet that she would be a key part of the fulfillment of the promise. Now they KNOW that Sarah will be the mother of Abraham's child, and yet Abraham once again offers her up to the king as a wife to protect himself. Interestingly, in this passage, it is the Lord who takes the initiative to protect the promise's fulfillment in this passage by coming to the foreign king (the one with all the power in this situation) in a dream and explaining the situation to him. The Lord rescues this foreign king from destruction. Immediately the next morning, Abimelech summons Abraham to explain himself. Abraham explains that he deceived the king because his assumptions (there is no fear of God in this place) made him afraid. His assumptions were obviously wrong for Abimelech is definitely more faithful than Abraham in this passage. Abraham further explains that he didn't totally lie because Sarah is his half-sister (these kind of incestuous marriages would later be banned by the law). Abimelech offers Abraham his choice of where to settle in this land as well as 1000 silver pieces to restore the family honor. This story is included to make sure no one could come back and say that the child Sarah bore was actually conceived through Abimelech. Abraham prays for Abimilech and everyone in the kingdom in need of healing is healed, and all the wombs are opened. Though Abraham had behaved deceptively, even in this story he is a blessing to the kingdom and to the king himself.